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SUBJECT: THIRD CONTRACT KILLING EVOKES MEMORIES OF 1990'S

REF: A. MOSCOW 10248
[1](#)B. MOSCOW 10603

Classified By: Econ M/C Quanrud, Reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. Vneshtorgbank banker Alexander Plokhin was gunned down October 11 in an apparent contract killing, the third in Moscow in a month. Foreign investors are growing increasingly concerned by the perception of lawlessness in the streets of Moscow, although local business leaders are taking this latest killing in stride so far. Separately, the press is reporting that authorities have apprehended suspects in Deputy Central Bank Chair Kozlov's murder case. All this evokes memories of 1990s violence in Moscow. Further violence could undermine what many Russians considered one of Putin's greatest successes: the return of public order. End Summary.

Plokhin

[1](#)2. (U) As commentators and analysts still try to make sense of the recent killings of Deputy Central Bank Chairman Kozlov and human rights journalist Anna Politkovskaya, the apparent contract murder of banker Alexander Plokhin this week evoked memories of the early 1990s when business partners and mafia alike resorted to guns to settle disputes. According to the press, Plokhin, director of an affiliate branch of state-owned Vneshtorgbank (VTB), was shot in the head as he got off the elevator to his Moscow apartment on October 11. Authorities suspect an accomplice outside tipped off the shooter as Plokhin entered the building. Plokhin's relatives told the press that he had received death threats in the past, but had opted not to employ bodyguards. Plokhin worked for Vneshtorgbank for the past 9 years. In the mid-1990s, he headed Moscow City Council's budgetary and finance committee.

[1](#)3. (C) According to Deutsche UFG chief economist, Yaroslav Lissovolik (strictly protect), foreign investors are increasingly concerned about this latest round of contract killings. However, he said that Russian contacts in Moscow's banking community are not particularly worried, but they were puzzled about Plokhin's murder and could not offer explanations. The president of the Association of Russian Banks suggested to the press on October 12 that Plokhin's murder was not the result of turf wars in the banking sector as some have speculated, but a general "criminalization of society."

Kozlov murder case update

¶4. (U) The press on October 11 reported Moscow authorities apprehended three suspects on October 3 in connection with the Kozlov case, but were denying that the suspects were in their custody. Two of the three suspects are Ukrainian nationals. The press reports that the three claim that an unknown intermediary approached them at the end of summer to kill "a bandit who swindles good people" for \$20,000. One of the suspects turned himself in to the police after finding out on television the identity of the victim. Subsequently, the two other suspects were apprehended. According to the press, the suspects refuse to cooperate in identifying the intermediary because they fear retribution.

¶5. (C) Comment. Whereas the Kozlov and Politkovskaya murders had political overtones, Plokhin was a mid-level banker. Plokhin's murder has received more attention because it is the third contract killing in Moscow in a month. The only common factor in all three murders so far is that they all appear to have been contracted and professionally executed. However, bankers have been regular targets of assassination with Plokhin the seventh banker to be killed in the past six years, according to the press. Many are closely following the Kremlin's response to these contract murders, as they undermine a central pillar of Putin's public support: the perception that Putin brought stability and order to Russia after the chaotic 1990s. End Comment.
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